BETRAYAL

"I want a mate, Judith, not a monster who spars with me."

"Mari, I think it's worse to keep things in then to get them out, don't you? You have all these wonderful poetical images in your head about romance but, you know, we have to face the reality that you can't stay here forever. And I don't see myself running to a country ruled by machine guns. Remember, I live in a democracy, supposedly. I don't think I could take being stalked day and night by guys in military uniforms."

"Who's talking about forever? You people in this country are like loco. You always have to have some insurance certificate on the future. I'm talking about now, Judith. Right now at nine o'clocks in the morning at 162 Fifth Avenue with last night's wine and incense making like beautiful images of bodies swimming in some eternal, sensual, glorious place."

"Maybe you've had a vision of the hereafter, my darling, but right now last night's wine is giving me a headache and I have to be at my job at ten o'clocks."

As I start to leave our bed, Mari grabs me in a hold tighter than any bear hug I've experienced. Her mouth is on my neck, biting and licking me like crazy. I feel the tingling in my back, then a rush of warmth between my legs; even my toes feel alerted by her passion.

"My loveliness, mi pequeña, pájarita...."

I resist her seductive love words. She knows I melt when she speaks Spanish to me—even if she's telling me I 'm a scoundrel.

"Te amo the dear, teeny, leetle hairs all over your body. I want to wash you like the mamas do with all them little babies. Judith, can't you to stay with me now? I'm still hungry for you today. You know, you fell asleep last night just when I was in some strange place of ecstasy. And I guess I'm still somewhere in that place."

"Darling Mari, I want to talk, but I also want to have some breakfast with you before I have to go off. Somebody's got to bring home the bacon."

"Okay, what you want to say me? I listen. I promet a good listen." For Mari this means licking and listening. My nipples are standing straight out like eager, young birds, stretching for nourishment.

"Damn it, Mari. I can't concentrate. I guess we better talk!"

She looks at me as if I've just whacked her. Then she shrinks into the mattress as I say, "I'm sorry, little one. I didn't mean to yell at you. I don't know, but maybe it's your obsession with me that causes a kind of terrible tension in me. You act like you're completely taken by me, but how real is it? The truth is sooner or later you're going to have to go back to Argentina. I have to protect myself. How can I let go and be with you in the way you want and need now when you're going to up and vanish soon? Maybe I am too future-oriented...." Her eyes lift towards me.

She is with me again as I go on. "Are you loving me, Mari, or just clinging to me? I know that I couldn't have done what you've done—not see my family for over four years and live with a totally different culture and language. But I can't be the one to fill the emptiness you must feel being in this country so foreign to you, this country that you see as your oppressor. At least you have to talk to me more about all the things going on inside you."

I half expect her to come out with some mysterious, quasar-philosophy, but her voice sounds sad when she says, "I never can to find the compromise between the image, the longing and the reality. Some kind of camaraderie between them that I can rest with."

"You mean like being with your beautiful images of bodies

swimming in some eternal, sensual, glorious place?"

"Yes, exactamente."

"Come on, honey. Don't be sad. We're both so hard on ourselves. That's what I mean. We've got to talk reality, our reality. Loving someone from the other side of the world is not exactly the same thing as loving someone from next door. Someone, you know, who you played mumblety-peg with at least once."

"Mumblety-peg, Judith? What can that be?"

"You never played that? That was my all-time favorite game. Maybe you did play it. I don't know what you would call it in Spanish."

"Describe to me."

"Okay, this will be a good test to see how good I can remember. You take a small knife."

"La navaja?"

"Is that a pocket knife?"

"Si."

"Okay, you take a navaja and you rest it with the blade open on different parts of your body: on your knuckles, different knuckles, your elbows, your shoulders. Then you have to flip the knife away from you there so that it sticks in the earth. And the person who doesn't get it to stick in the ground is supposed to 'mumble the peg.' That means pulls a peg out of the ground with their teeth. But we never did that part when we played."

"That sounds like so painful kind of game. Like primitive."

"No, not really. You just have to be careful and dexterous. Did you ever play a game like that?"

"No, little Mumbly. We play the more peaceful games than you people here."

"See, I told you. We didn't even grow up doing the same things. How do you expect us to tune in on the same wave length just like that?"

"We tuned in very well on the wavelength. I can still to taste you from last night. So delicioso."

"I know, but it gets harder, the more you know somebody. It takes practice, work."

"We played a game with a geometrico configuration on the

ground and a stone that you jump around called rayuela."

"That sounds like hopscotch. We play that here too, but more fun was marbles. You got to keep all the marbles you won. And God forbid if you lost your marbles." I giggle but Mari doesn't get my joke.

"Well, I think we like our little games and you like your little games, but what is it you are trying to say me, Judith?"

"I don't know exactly. I just wish you'd played marbles and mumblety-peg too, that's all. It just feels that we always have to explain everything to each other. Things can't just be, like relaxed or something. Everything to you is so intense. I mean even if you did play marbles, you'd see them all as something else. Some little objects to turn into all the animals and birds. Like those huacas you were telling Josh and me about. Sometimes things are just what they are. A marble is a marble. A knife is a what'd you say? Navaja?"

"A mumblepeg is a mumblepeg. What does a mumblepeg look like?"

"I don't know what it looks like. We never really used one. But love sometimes is what it is. Like sex is sex. Maybe that's it, Mari! Maybe that's been it all along. We're sexually attracted to each other but we're not in love. You'll go back to your country. I'll stay here and we'll write letters once a week and that's it. We'll keep reminding each other what a wonderful love affair we had together."

"That's not what I feel about you. I feel like to know something what it means to join,to—what you people say, catharte?—like for me some cataclysmic kind of togetherness I never to know before."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." What can I say to her? She is crying. When I reach out to hold her, to comfort her, some invisible force—is it outside of me or inside, or is it around Mari, protecting her? I don't know, but that force stops me and says, 'Don't touch her. Let her cry.'

It is as if I've come upon a waterfall I've never seen before—but not really that—more like seeing a teacher who'd always served as an unquestionable source of composure and informa-

tion suddenly transform in front of me into a mass of uncertainty. I've gotten used to Mari reaching out for me eagerly, hungrily with sureness. Now she is a fountain of tears and I am not allowed to drink from the water. This fountain is just meant to be wondered at.

I finally feel compelled to nuzzle the wonderment. "Look, maybe I just have a problem, Mari, about closeness. I'm still trying to figure out who I am. Maybe I have twin-phobia—afraid of being too much like someone else and afraid of being too different. I see you as very unique. You just are. I'm terribly drawn to you. It's possible I'm afraid you'll make me invisible."

Mari looks at me as if I am speaking nonsense. "You seems to hold your own very well with others—like Josh."

"Well, that took years of practice. Besides he's a man. It's not that hard to tell who's me and who's him. He's got a penis and I've got a vagina. I'm talking about being with a woman, connecting with a woman. When I'm in love with a woman, I just naturally feel that she's a part of me. I'm learning the hard way about keeping healthy boundaries. And sometimes I end up fighting the very closeness I seek. I think that's a good way to explain it."

"That's the twin stuff you got to work through. That's not you and me."

"Probably even if you did grow up in Centerville, Ohio like I did...which you didn't and which you never would have anyway so I don't know what I'm saying except that I would still have trouble relating to you. I don't think I know yet how to get it together with someone I really feel close to like I really feel close to you. With Josh, I knew we were really different—like two different species with two different cultures. The Jew and the lesbian—survivors. So I could relax and be okay with whatever closeness we could experience. Maybe I'm just saying that men and women are so different you don't really expect the kind of closeness that you do with a woman."

"Judith, if you have to analyze so much what it is you can feel, I wonders sometime what it is really that you feel for me. I have so dear and beloved painter friend to me, Carlos. With him

I have explored some places in the mind I never can with anyone else. We have the different things with the different people. That is the beauty of the life. Do not be so worry for every little meaning."

Talking to her feels good. "I am glad we're going to have some more months together because I don't want to be tense with you. I want to mesh with you. Whether it's sexual or loving, I don't know any more. I don't want to be upset that I have to leave you in the morning and go to my job."

Mari is no longer crying. She is staring hard at me. Either she is completely absorbed in what I'm saying or hasn't heard one word. She appears to have gone into a trance.

"Mari, Mari, come back to me. What is it? What have I said now that upsets you so much? Please talk to me."

"Judith, there's something I have to say to you. I've been waiting for the right moment. Maybe now it is." The tears have dried. She is another person—confident, calm, brilliant, shining. Her sun has healed her.

I try to imagine what she will tell me. I think of the possibilities: someone is going to publish her latest poems; or she has a job with Casa de las Americas where she went for an interview the week before. It has to be something good because her depression is gone. And it can't have anything to do with us because the anxiety lines have disappeared from her forehead.

"Mari, what is it? I'm a captive audience. Tell me the good news and then let's get some breakfast. I don't want to be late for work the third morning in a row."

"I'm leaving for Europe in two weeks. I'll be heading right for Paris. The people there I knew from Argentina have contacted me so I know I have the compatible people to stay with. I'm going to find the European blood in me. It's like the missing link that has kept an invisible specter dancing on my head. There are so many Latino-American artists who have escaped the regime and yet are still to keeping them souls and their work together in some place because they can't to live in our country. And I want to know their stories and to take them on with me."

I am stunned. I am shocked. I am speechless, yet I speak.

"Mari, you can't go. I just fixed up a desk for us, for you to write at. We're just getting close. It's like a betrayal of our love, our new love. I'm just learning how to except that you're from another planet from me but that's okay. And Josh loves you. You've become his best friend. What about the talks you two have together? What about us, Mari? What about us?"

Mari doesn't respond. She just keeps looking straight ahead like an arrow knowing where it's going next even though it's suspended for a moment in its flight. Through my own tears I watch the arrow disappear.

* * *

Two week go by; I can't tell whether two minutes or two decades vanish. I don't know whether to touch Mari or ignore her. She is some person already in my past. We talk and we make love during that time at least once. I try ploys to get her to stay. My mind is a jumble of accusations, well-wishes, profound analyses meant to numb all of the swirling emotions inside.

The idea does occur to me to go with her. In fact, she suggests it. But that means quitting my job; I have three more months to go before I will be eligible again for unemployment as I am a kind of seasonal typesetter for a publishing company. I guess I have my own method of survival so I can compose music and write. It would be a luxury for me to run off with her. Besides I have puritanical blood in me.

I can't be like her. I can't just take off like that and have an adventure. I have to have some kind of security. I can't run down to 5th Avenue and panhandle enough change for a bag of groceries in exactly one half hour like she can—I timed her once. I can't go up to perfect strangers and have them invite me to visit them in their homes like she can. I can't buy somebody else a cup of coffee without knowing who they are like she can.

I can't believe that now I am the same person who only three weeks before was completely clear about the fact that we would have to leave each other and that no amount of togetherness or compromise could change that fact. I was sure we were both destined to make waves in the bloodstreams of our respective countries. We had no choice but to follow our separate paths or

roads as she liked to call them. Neither of us, not even for the Lesbian Archives' Book of Records, has been prepared to dig up our family roots and transplant them to the other's hemisphere.

But Europe? Mari going off to Europe? What sense does that make? That feels like a luxury in this process of root gathering. It is enough for me to deal with North America and South America. Now she is bringing the whole of Europe into our relationship as well.

For the first time with Mari I feel definitely a provincial. I feel like maybe there is something to this bit about sticking to someone from your own neighborhood. Now all those flowers I've noted that break through cement, performing the impossible to survive, seem like miracles Mari and I will never imitate. It takes a long time to affirm a new reality, and we're not giving it a chance.

I disentangle myself from this emotional trauma long enough to wave good-bye to her but later, I hardly remember the dinner at an Argentinian restaurant on Forty-sixth Street with Josh and his friend, Saul. The three of them were laughing easily together and stuffing themselves with her favorite Argentinian dishes. The wine felt like acid to me and the food like bits chafing against the tight knot of my stomach.

While Josh and Saul banter with her over survival techniques—how could they have not notice the depth of my pain?—I tiptoe further into myself, analyzing how her movements in and out of my life challenge my existence. Is my connection to her, similar to the immediate bond between trapeze partners—one faulty step by either acrobat and both plummet into another dimension?

I think of the deaf woman I have seen "listening" to a musician play in the village. She places her fingertips on the sounding board of his guitar, absorbing the plucked notes into her body. I feel that only the listening hands of a mute person could 'hear' the melody of my love song for Mari. But then I can't hear the melody of my own love song; I love dumbly.

We are still sipping black coffee, taking in spoonfuls of custard, when suddenly she takes off in the springtime for Paris. I

will not be there to watch her smell roses in the Tuilleries or eat croissants on the Boulevard St. Germain. Here we are, new lovers, but we are separating.

She always maps out an escape route when she enters a new place or situation. The fact is, she purchased an airplane ticket the day after she came to stay with me. She had told herself if it went well she'd stay, if not, she'd leave. That put the burden of proof all on me. I guess I don't match the images she had sewn in her heart. How is she going to reconcile love affairs with her root-gathering business anyway?

And I have been feeling guilty towards her! She can't promise me a rose garden either. She does have her road. She does know how to take care of herself. She knows both how to stick to a challenging situation and how to flee an unpleasant one. She is scorpion; she is fox. She is alacran; she is zorra. And I am the abandoned lover left to pick up her discarded passions strewn on my bed.

* * *

In the danker cellars of my mind a monster twinship still lurks. This pair holds one key to Christian thought. Jesus, the gentle, the holy, is twinned forever to Judas, the nervous, the betrayer. Without Judas, Jesus, Superstar of Human Suffering, would not have been dutifully nailed and elevated over centuries of altars.

I long for the deaths of betrayers and crucified heroes. I await the revival of enchanting trios, like the Three Graces who swirl in the delirious dance of owning and not betraying their own feelings—each of them allowing that to happen in the others.

"Hello, Judith?"

"Who is this? I can't hear you. There's a radio in the phone."

"I'm sorry I missed our birthday. You missed our birthday, too."

"Meredith, is that you?"

"That's what my husband calls me. Is something wrong with your voice? It sounds strange, deeper."

"I'm going through a sex change."

"What? I can't hear you. Wait a minute, I'll call you back. Now that we know who we are let's try it again. Hang up, okay?"

I can't believe my twin, my sister Meredith, is calling me. We haven't called each other since she visited Josh and me at our loft on Prince Street and she got so upset because we were using cushions to sit on instead of chairs. I don't think we had much furniture. Letters, holiday, and birthday cards kept a line of communication between us, not to mention my birthday presents to her and her kids. But we rarely called.

"Hi again. I'm here." Meredith's voice is lighter, more clipped than mine.

"That's better. I can hear you clearly," I say, trying to lighten my voice. I don't want to sound strange to her. "I can't believe you're calling me. Is something wrong?"

"No, everything's fine."

"How's everybody? How are the boys?"

"Oh, they're just great. Mario's going to Poly Tech in the fall. He's going to be a chemist like Father."

"Oh, that's nice."

"And Sal wants to be a musician. Maybe he takes after you. He plays in the school band, the orchestra and he's got his own dance band going. They play at all the Italian street fairs in the city. "

"That's really terrific, Meredith."

"You didn't ask me about Rico."

"How's Rico?"

"If you really want to know—he's the same, but worse. I don't know, but I think he's going through a mid-life crisis. He's turning into a 70s hippie. I mean I thought it was great when he wanted to stop being a surgeon and go into creating database systems for emergency rooms. I mean that made sense. Now he's a consultant for some kind of medical firm which means he stays at home and putters around the house."

"Maybe there isn't anything wrong with that, Meredith. Maybe you should change some of your ideas about what a husband is supposed to do and what a wife is supposed to do. We're all people going through a lot of changes. Try not to worry too much."

"You have to plan when you have kids, Judith. But you wouldn't know about that."

"Listen, I worry a lot about other people. How's your work going?"

"My boss is great. But how long can I keep designing cheerful ads for Supreme Meat Products when I'm going off meat. I think all the chemicals they inject into the cattle kill us."

"It sounds like you've become political, a little bit, Meredith?"

"No, just smart. So how are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine. I'm getting ready to go on a music tour."

"By yourself?"

"Oh, no. A friend and I are touring the east coast together. We're leaving next week. She plays the sax. It sounds great with the marimba."

"You're not taking our marimba are you, Judith?"

"As a matter of fact, yes, I am."

"That's still half mine you know."

"You had it for a long time, for years. It was my turn."

"I'm just kidding, don't worry. Okay, well, I've got to go; my family needs me. Mama Marchetti and I are planning a birthday party for Mari."

My heart misses a beat. "For whom?" Hearing Meredith say her name instantly makes me feel the pain of our separation again.

"For Mari, Mario—Mari is what Mama Marchetta calls him. He's eighteen this month. Don't you remember his birthday is in the same month as ours?"

"I have a friend called Mari too," I manage weakly. I want to pour out my pain, say she has left me to go to Europe; I bite my lip and let Meredith talk.

"I guess there are a lot of Marios in New York. Don't you have a Mario Cuomo in your state politics? I've heard of him. Rico's a democrat and now I've become one."

"Never mind, Meredith. So thanks for calling and telling me your news."

"Sure thing. One of these years I'll scrounge up some money and come to New York again, see a Broadway musical."

"That would be great. By the way, my house is cleaner these

days. So let me know when you can come and I'll get tickets for something."

"And have a great tour, playing *our* marimba. Bye now."

"Thanks for calling, Meredith."

"Later alligator. Oh, by the way, I just want to tell you, I miss not seeing Josh anymore. That's all, bye."

* * *

Leslie transports me with her sax. She inspires my singing. Her wide range, both tonally and melodically, invites improvisation. Her rhythms are familiar to me. We share a common culture; she was born and raised in New England. Of course, there are regional differences, but if I ask, "Gee, I wonder whatever happened to the Painted Women's Ritual Theater," she knows what I am talking about. We hit it off so well musically we decide to do an August concert tour together. I am on the off part of my seasonal book production job—free to move about.

We are traveling minstrels. A friend's apartment in Cambridge serves as home base. We gig in small clubs, churches, and women's centers throughout New England, stay either with friends or camp out to save money. We pick up another musician or two to play with us along the way.

One of our best concerts takes place in an old part of Cambridge where narrow streets, dotted with respectable tourists, twist around quaint, important buildings. Our local grapevine has informed us that chances for playing here are very good; liberal churches rent out space for modern and innovative types of music.

We begin the Saturday night concert, attended by about a hundred and fifty people most of whom were women from the community, with a chant: "We come dance-a-ling. We drum, hear us sing, our music. We come, hear us bring. We strum, hear it ring, your music." The chant ends with a recitation of the names of many women classical composers and the names of their compositions.

Leslie then dresses up on stage as Bach might have for a concert and begins playing a two-part invention on the piano.

Simultaneously, I climb onto a spot-lighted table and begin to do a belly dance. Michelle, the drummer, fingers intricate rhythms on her three conga drums. Before long the music takes on a jazz-like form.

Suddenly Michelle starts singing something like, "Bah, Bah, Bach, if you only knew. What a power trip they've made out of you." I jump off the table, pick up my marimba sticks and improvise with the others. When we all begin cackling and directing our attention to the grotesque shapes above us, the surrealness of the scene catches everyone's attention and soon the sanctuary is filled with laughter and stomping feet. The cathartic quality of this piece makes way for a gentler, deeper space in which we play our original songs.

Leslie ripples on her sax, I gallivant up and down the rosewood marimba keys and Michelle plucks and picks her guitar strings for one and a half hours.

By the time we arrive at our last song, one created by the three of us, the crowd is on it s feet, not to applaud us as much as to applaud itself. Leslie ends up behind our magic curtain, a shadow screen, where she images herself as a great black bird, soaring and encircling us all. She seems ecstatic. I leap all over the space, singing, "Ah, Women," again and again.

Afterwards in the Good Goddess bar in Boston, Leslie and I stroll around and around the dance floor like newborn leprechauns, mapping out our next concert. Michelle won't be able to join us as she is joining a group of clam-diggers for the week in Provincetown.

"Are you asleep?"

I don't answer her.

"Judith, are you asleep?"

The bed rocks as Leslie turns over, away from me. Damn, now she thinks I am asleep.

"Yes, I'm asleep," I say in a hardly audible voice. "But I'm not all that asleep."

The bed moves again as she turns back to me.

"You mean all that dancing at the bar didn't relax you?"

"It got me tired out, that's for sure. But it didn't get rid of my tension." I want to say 'horniness,' but I am not going to come on to her. Fuck, why am I being so careful? Maybe I should tell her I've decided it would not be good for us to be lovers. And if she doesn't want to be lovers?

"I'm afraid of you, she says." Have I heard her right? "Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes. What's there to be afraid of?"

The night before I had massaged her. It had relaxed us both. We have a good working relationship; it had to be kept that way.

"Because I'm attracted to you."

The words sound funny—*attracted to you.* Am I emitting some unusual odor? But the feeling which arises in me feels wonderful.

"I've done it before." My voice seems harsh.

There is a pause, then, "I have too."

"I didn't mean I've done *it* before. What I mean is, I've decided not to do it with someone I'm attracted to before. I've done *that* before."

"Oh, I thought you meant...." She stops short.

No words come to me either.

"I want to hold you, but I restrain myself," she says.

Okay, now tell her again how a working relationship can get fucked up by this kind of thing. Is she asking me for some direction?

"I want you too, Leslie. But you see it wouldn't be good for us. Believe me. I speak from experience."

"Is there someone else, Judith?"

I don't answer.

Why is she moving towards me, touching my arm?

"Then let me."

"Let you?" I go weak, queasy. Her arms are around me. Her weight presses down on me. This isn't what I mean at all. I wrap my arms around her.

"Perhaps," she says, "It will be easier this way."

"At least," I say as our lips touch, "it will be more fun."

In the morning a letter arrives from Mari, forwarded by Josh from New York City. Mari will be back in New York soon; her six month stay in Europe is coming to an end.

Paris Monday 18 March

Ma petite Judith. My douce, strong, luminosa, Judith. I come back from l'Alliance at noon, walking by le Boulevard Raspail, without stop in the cafe of Boulevard Montparnase, walking by le rue Gassendi along the dark cemetery of Montparnase, under the rain, the thin rain that fell all the time here, under the naked trees. Walking soon to my house because today I was waiting your letter. But no, no still. Sure tomorrow it will come. I begin to write you now, so I prepare the space for our letter of tomorrow, like you prepared a space for me in your little studio times ago.

It's very strange, but now I can perceive how much I wake up as feminist in the past months in New York. I had long discussions with the few women and men with who I talked these last weeks. They support to me in many ways, but the men who belong to the Marxist-Latino-American-Intelligentsia sustain that is necessary to take the power first, and only then, under the proletarian government will be possible to work for the liberation of the women. Before revolution there will be energy loss between the members of the revolutionary vanguard that will provoke division and antagonism inside the proletarian class, inside the "proletarian couple," as Leon said.

But now all begins to be so clear for me. And I want to tell you that the process of liberation of the women will be not before or after the proletarian class take over the power; it will be during, along with the struggle for to take power and for to organize a new society. In the colonized countries like my country, the work will be inside the revolutionary vanguard whose values, attitudes and praxis would reflect in the inward life of the group certain correspondence with the future society they begin to build, like the embryo of a future body. A false concept of unity would cause the loss of the creative revolutionary energy of this social group, the women.

To work with the proletarian woman towards her own awak-

ening of conscience about her situation, her droits, her herstory and her role inside the liberation's processes of herself, her class, her country and all the human beings will win the force of the militant woman with the natural tensions that a revolutionary process imply. So that a woman that once only "followed" her husband or father or brother or lover can become an authentic and self-conscious militant.

Even those with reformist characteristics will help in some ways, because the woman will begin to see her closer oppressor, father, husband, boyfriend. She will have more possibility of amplifying her vision and to see the power the dominant class have over her and also to see the working man who is victim and murderer at the same time. This will be so much the difficult struggle for the woman.

Can you excuse me? I know that you know almost all this but I want to tell you in my analytic way because all this have a deep relationship with our affective relationship because I learn so much from you and from other women in your country.

I'm living a high intellectual creative period. I'm sleeping only 3 or 4 hours each day but I'm not tired. I have passionate lectures, discussion, contradictions in the road of to become a Latino-American feminist Marxist. Like in the kindergarten I begin to learn to be a woman, WOMAN. And now this woman begin to write about her—they in singular and plural over the world which she identificate more herself. Latino-America, Africa, Vietnam. but I learned to see so much in USA. I'm to see so much in Europe. I will learn to see terrible much always at each place where I will go.

I'm reading Kolontai, Engles, M'Rabet, Reed, Millet, Bachoffen, Rowbotham and so many others and pamphlets and collections of articles about the woman in Argentina and the Program of Transition of Trotsky and jumping under the trees the sun the petitefou birds and meetings and long long sweet dreams with you.

Next Friday I will read poems at Cuba House in the campus with other Latino-American poets youth and Saturday Argentine Trotskyists will give a talk about Argentine political situations

and my little room more beautiful each day and my children that I keep growing and me loving you and the miracle of life.

I understand the situation that you tell me about what happen when you sang your translations of Sappho's poems. I can to see both faces. The women who left because you used the translations of your man friend, Theodoros. And the right of him to read the poems because of his love for the poems and his dedicated work to translate the poem—because all human creation is for all the human being and because we work and fight for a society without class, race, sexual descrimination.

I know that these women need so much a culture that they create themselves. And I understand when you say that some of these women go to the Mafia run clubs at same time and I think that the problem is that we don't to see clearly the origin of the woman oppression and exploitation and to elaborate the vision of the women's struggle integrated with the vast class's struggle. Because there is not women's liberations without socialist revolutions and there is not socialist revolutions without women's liberations.

I will write each day more like a woman, about women and for women, but also for men. The day will comes that we will be all sisters and brothers in the grand communist human community, and I want to work for it.

And I clean my teeths all the nights and I undress myself and I go to the bed with a terrible empty space between my arms. But each morning I hug the trees for you and for me and I ask them when will begin the spring. Then they answer me, "Don't worry. Her spring always begins again."

I'm writing again, working over poems that I begin to write in New York and working in little notes in my new European Journal.

I met three days ago a Latino-American poet that I wanted to know so much in the past. He is a nice person, very famous for here, so non-political anarchist. Of course we don't have political concordance, but we can to talk about many things.

Say to Josh that I love him so much. I miss him and our conversations and the soups and Watergate and the little plays that

he made for us and him clear, beautiful face. A strong embrace for Saul, who I love so much. He is like the tongue of your language for me. A so generous person and of course I feel so close to him because he know my language like a landscape of him own.

I would like kiss you on the top of your nose, my wild spirit. Judith who make me happy-unhappy.

I see a red point some times and seem like some sound from my guitar. I afraid again to become crazy. Little deformations and strange events which I cant to recount now. Listen I love you terrible much but I suffered at New York like here now. Qu'est que c'est? Que'est que c'est? I saw you singing so beautiful in the lesbian demonstration in the video of Luisa and Nora. There are two days that I don't talk a word with nobody.

If I could embrace you now all would become quiet and real again. I want to eat the lobe of your ear. Thanks for the songs of Violetta Para. Some day I will can play it with your help.

Yesterday I played for hours my guitar. She come to meet me in the space of my solitude. There where only the love or sometime the words come. I was waiting years for her and she come from you because you teach me not to be afraid of her.

Tomorrow I will go to look for some job. To keep children one day for week. $6 dollar, nothing for day and I will begin in l'Alliance again. Here the death of Pompidou opened a funny political landscape full of activity.

Finally I received letter from my mother talking about my return that I anticipated from her. And I'm so frightened so now I need to write her to clarify many things.

I would like that you, Josh and Saul meet for to eat bean stew and Portuguese wine and to read my poems and letters and to talk about me. Pardon I know that is too much, but I miss the little, dirty, magnificent people that all you are. I give you my lucidity and my madness and the little things of my life. And I give you the word, slender, that I like so much and I give you the greenness of my onion plant and I give you the house of my body with the little but faithful fire that it keep. Always for you my mornings shine.

And I see you later, hermanita. I need to stop now or never I will send this letter. But I will begin to write you another next hour when I will come back from the post office.

My child lover, tell me all about your performances. I would like so much to be there and to see you. Are you becoming a lover with some other? It would hurt me so much. Tell me that you understand and that you wait for me until August. I'll be back to you around that time. Please keep me as your closest person until I can to find my way back to my homeland. Tell me that you love me like I love you.

Chou, Mari

* * *

Mari returns from France at the same time Leslie and I return to New York City. All the work I am doing to keep myself centered seems futile. In the presence of these two women, I, who have worked so hard to join flesh and spirit, feel my body and soul separate. As my body clings to Leslie, my present physical lover, my soul flies to Mari, my spiritual lover.

When I try to integrate myself by dressing Mari in feathers and scarves, begging her to join Leslie and me on stage, she rebels.

New York City's harsh and competitive atmosphere does not help gentle these awkward times. Leslie's and my blossoming musical career quickly dies. The last concerts are devoid of spontaneity and excitement. The creative aspects are crushed in the pressure to make saleable products. Though Leslie is challenged by the competitive atmosphere, I am exhausted by it. While she tosses her head back and snorts before beginning to play, I turn inward, almost hiding behind the marimba.

Our last concert should not happen. Luckily many people who might have come escape the city on the hot, Saturday afternoon. The small gallery room is not air conditioned and you can see programs waving unenergetically throughout the space like small, limp flags. These tiny movements forewarn the gust about to erupt on stage.

Leslie and I haven't talked real to each other since Mari's return. I am still hoping to juggle both relationships. But the fact is

they are both heading for crash landings. I should know a disaster is coming when Leslie drops her sax case before the performance on the pavement in front of the gallery in Soho, then stares at me accusingly. "Why did you make me do that, Judith?" she shouts. Flames consume her love for me.

As we force our way through the program our voices sound harsh, accompaniments off. Concentration is impossible. She stomps through her numbers and honks like a mad goose, while I rap on the wooden keys, scattering broken phrases all over the stage. Where are the liquid sax sounds, my earthy marimba rolls? That she has smoked grass all afternoon and I have downed several glasses of wine serves only to make us even less in touch with our music.

When our musical numbers end, and the audience is clapping politely, I can no longer contain the tension that has built up inside me. I go off like a jack hammer. I throw my sticks down and stomp to back-center stage. Too bad we aren't into wrecking our instruments like so many rock stars are. We would get out our feelings without anyone knowing it.

I had set up a silk curtain for the concert upon which to project a revolving circle of colors. Now using this curtain both as shadow screen and backdrop, I pour my emotions into body movements. First, I pantomime a ferocious and cruel Leslie. After stepping behind the screen again, I appear from the other side as myself, imaged as overwhelmed and victimized. For my third act, I walk through the cloth and attempt to be two people groping for a dialogue.

I must simulate a marionette frantically looking for her personality. Nobody applauds my encore. Only hanging mouths, blinking eyes, greet me. Leslie is shocked. She sees me as committing terrible injustice to her music. Thank god Mari isn't here!

When it is all over, neither of us speaks to anyone. She runs out quickly, disappearing into the murky fumes of a hot city night. I put my instruments into a taxi and rush to her apartment building on the Upper East Side. I really want to drive off the 12th Street pier. After I put my instruments in the lobby, I run to her door which is just closing and wedge my foot in the crack.

Lucky I have my boots on.

I am slapped with words, "You are wasting your time. Nobody ever does that in my concerts."

"We better talk, Leslie," I say in a matronly manner, watching the crack in the door get smaller. "We never should have played this afternoon. We haven't talked enough and look what happens when we don't. Furthermore, I don't believe that you aren't jealous about Mari!"

By charging into our fragile musical space and performing an exorcism at her as well as my own expense, I feel that somehow, almost obligingly, I am giving her a perfect opportunity to punish me for loving Mari. Am I incorporating these two women in an old pattern—once again giving my twin, Meredith a chance to punish me for being close to my mother-lover? Though Leslie has once said it was fine that I love Mari as well as her, obviously that is not so. Otherwise, why had Leslie stopped talking to me way before the concert?

Earlier, she confided to me that her parents had pampered her brother into Yale, while encouraging her to think of music as a hobby. So she was not supported, either economically or emotionally, by them to study music formally. At the least, our summer together has given me creative companionship and bolstered her faith in herself, enough to eventually go back to school and get a degree in the sax.

After I force the door open, I follow her into the apartment. She charges into the room where July, her daughter, is reading and flicks out the light. I hear her ordering July to go to sleep immediately though it is only 6:00.

When she comes out to the living room, I beg again that we talk.

She does not respond, but goes to the telephone and calls up her friend Gail to discuss the afternoon's events. "She's nuts," Leslie whispers in a very loud voice. "She was drunk and made a fool out of herself. I think she really is a witch!"

The room blurs in front of me. I am already remembering how Leslie's lips curled when she said my name. I am already remembering the placement of the furniture in her room.

She hangs up the receiver and glares at me. I think how ugly she seems, and she has never seemed ugly before. "You better go. I don't want to have to kick you out," she demands.

She is ruthless and I am going to fight back. She gathers things of mine I've left in the house and starts throwing them out on the sidewalk. When she throws a small antique guitar from my grandmother out the door and I hear it bounce on the cement, I stomp up to her and take a swing at her jaw.

"Nobody has ever hit me before and you have the audacity to do it in front of my child," she shouts, flailing her arms at me, though her child is sound asleep in the apartment. By now she has thrown all of my belongings out the door. I'll never forget the look an elderly woman shot at us as she swept by, pulled in the steaming early evening air by a small yapping dog with a ribbon tied on its tail. I can't believe this is happening to me either. This is the end of my relationship with Leslie.

* * *

Mari cannot comfort me. She has her own pain about the situation. She knows the score because I wrote to her about Leslie. Monogamy or non-monogamy could no longer be even an argument between us; I had become lovers with another.

We try to sleep in my studio, side by side on the couch, but she won't hold me or let me hold her. There seemed to be no resting place. Even the fact that I have told her the truth does not ease the situation. Her hurt over my actions culminates in a threat to jump off the roof.

For days she sits at a small table in the bathroom, staring at a photo of Margarita, her old friend, who had killed herself. Margarita, in her 40 s, became a famous Argentinian poet. Mari has read me excerpts from her long visionary poems. Her disturbing, surreal imagery actually chronicled real, brutal events taking place in that country—the disappearance of thousands of Argentinians without a trace.

One poem is about the women who came to be known as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They met every Thursday in a central plaza in Buenos Aires to decry the sudden disappear-

ances of their loved ones into the generals' prisons and their subsequent torture and often murder. The women gathered faithfully once a week, wearing white scarfs and carrying the photographs of their missing loved ones. She described how the square, the Plaza de Mayo in front of the Casa Rosada which houses the military, takes on apocalyptic dimensions as the women wail their urgent demands that this terrible outrage be stopped.

I think of my experience on the Lesbian Boat Ride—being surrounded by hundreds of womens' bodies, but in a pleasurable situation.

Margarita described the meshing of thousands of women in this one square to share, not enjoyment, but grief. Imagine the terrible impotence and injustice one feels to have one's own government snatch up, murder, mutilate family members who are voicing their right to live within a just and humane system. The images she created of these women enduring as well as exploding their anger, their horror, left me with a new understanding of the power of the life force. Surely the real collaboration of women giving witness to their will and power would serve to generate the strength to eliminate the junta regime.

Mari will not let me look at the photo of her poet of truth.

One night as I try to find some rest from the tension between us, I hear disconcerting footsteps on the roof above me. Instinctively, immediately, I know it is Mari. I flash upon her teetering on the edge of the roof, six floors above Fifth Avenue. It is the kind of act I can see Mari performing. Those footsteps will always echo in my memory.

I am on the roof without consciousness of how I got there. Never have I moved so fast in my life and then so slowly. Mari isn't one to be grabbed; she might react and really jump by mistake. I move so she won't know I am moving, with the slowness of the moon circling the earth. When she is mine, I lock her in my arms, imagining them as strong as steel clamps.

I lead her to the roof door and down the steps to the hallway.

Luckily Josh is in his studio which is next to mine. Although

he cannot always be there to support me when my lovers threaten to jump away from me, this night he is. A welcoming beam of light issues from his open doorway.

"What's going on with you two?" he calls out. He always senses when something is not right with me. But I know if I tell him that Mari had threatened to jump off the roof she will never forgive me. This event was just between her and me.

"Mari's not feeling well, Josh," I say. "Help me convince her to lie down for a while." He comes to her and hugs her hard. "Come into my place, Mari. I'll hot some tea and you can have some crackets and jamble." He speaks her English. She relaxes as he coddles her and we both walk her into his room.

I cook a special meal for her. I want her to be happy with me again. I make her a Josh dinner—rare steak, a well-seasoned vegetable, some slender hash brown potatoes. She relaxes into the blue-cushioned chair, looks about the familiar room and finds again a remnant of that trust she had once let blossom for me. She tells me the more difficult aspects of her search for roots in Paris. She reconstructs what happened there when she went to Le Libre des Mademoiselles Joyeaus one evening. She describes the excitement that fluttered around Claire Desmonde, the lesbian writer celebré who was reading that night—Mari just happened to be passing by the bookstore with her new friend, the Latino-American poet who was 'so beautiful a poet and so removed from the politics,' the same friend she had written to me about. I listen to the nuances and innuendoes of these interchanges.

She tells me how Claire's eyes stung her cheeks like cold snowflakes—how the coldness of the flakes aroused her. "Lashes from sharp whips make horses cry out," she says. Brutal imagery permeated the stuffy bookstore and acted on Mari like a stimulant. She couldn't resist the woman's spell.

She knew how violence erupts when passions are harnessed to serve laws and not love. Her own natural feelings had been repressed by the strict Catholic teachings in childhood, teachings which paradoxically were conveyed through sensual, exciting rituals. The woman incanting in front of her was igniting that

potent mixture of repression and violence by describing acts of sado-masochism between women.

Mari was simultaneously repelled and attracted by this display. She herself was still in the process of transforming the powerful hold these early teachings had for her. The old violence between her and her mother was stirred. Her mother's struggle to control her daughter's being was mirrored in the shocking imagery of lesbian bodies being devoured by lovers. Her cheeks flushed. The long careful dialogues on women's political roles seemed far away. Cold flakes tattooed stars on Mari's eyelids.

After the grand poet dismissed her consorts one by one with a stylish embrace, a flaunting look, a calculated word or promise, she asked Mari to go home with her. Mari did. She was hypnotized. She was not herself. She was going to learn something.

At the woman's house, in the presence of candlelight, the heavy atmosphere of incense, Mari's tears were drawn. Together they performed a ceremony. The wounds which the woman's words had opened in Mari were now swabbed with Mari's own tears. Then when the woman smiled, snow from her eyes melted and cooled the wounds. She aggressed upon Mari's body. Her tongue drew new blood from the unhealed hurts. Mari felt the blood of herself and the blood of her beloved Jesus flow out of her. She wrapped a shawl of blood around the body of her confessor, her torturer, her healer, Claire Desmonde. Together they said a prayer for wholeness.

Mari woke up the next morning alone in a strange house; mosaic designs from the bathroom floor were imprinted in her skin. When she left the house she retraced her steps back to the bookstore and asked questions. Claire Desmonde had not read at the bookstore they said. There had been no poetry reading there the night before.

She went back to her rented room on La Rue Gassendi and slept for two days.

"She must have drugged you, Mari. This sounds like hallucinations."

"Who? What she? I couldn't to find a trace of her."

"Well, what about the friend who took you to the bookstore?"

"He didn't want to go in. Like some kind of intimidation of the lesbian circle for him. I said I would meet him later."

"Did he see posters in the windows advertising a poetry reading with her name?"

"He said there was only a display of the current Marxist thought in the literary circles of Paris."

"Mari, you must have dreamt this."

"No. Three days after it happened I still had red lines all over my body."

"Maybe some guy did it to you. Drugged you at the bookstore. Did you smoke anything with your friend before the reading? Somebody put a narcotic in something you drank, then took you to somebody's house and assaulted you. A woman wouldn't do that, would she? Is there a poet named Claire Desmonde in Paris now?"

"There is. You people will hear about her here soon. She is a so fameuse lesbian there with a constant circle of women around her. I went to look for her but the people at her house said she was traveling abroad."

"What do you remember about the sexual stuff? Did you really enjoy it? Did you respond?"

"I feel I was completely taken over by some terrible force. That this woman's will was devouring me and I couldn't to stop her. When I woke up, I found a panuelo, what you say, a kerchief? tied around my wrist with the initials CD on it. It happened. But maybe another time zone, another space. She had the more power over me than anyone I've ever experienced. Whatever she want me to do I would have done. It was like my own constructs, my images were consumed in her eyes of cold fire. I was burnt up in desire for her. Something like that. The anchoring place for me was you, Judith. The love you hold me. I kept to say your name over and over to keep me. I couldn't have escaped from her intensity except for memory of you, Judith. Your face of New York like some kind of mooring place for me."

"I just don't understand, Mari. It all sounds like some kind of fantastic fabrication."

"For me it was the true, Judith. Even if somehow I did imagine some of it."

When Mari fell into my lap, an avalanche of tears, I was ready for her. I cradled her. "It's all right, sweetheart. It's really all right. However it happened, it did happen. And it's alright to feel passion for more than one person at the same time, too. Whatever you feel, it's okay. After all, we do come out of two people who in turn each come out of two. They in turn have come out of two more each, and on and on.... We should just be careful to love people who are good to us."

It was wonderful to have Mari relax with me and to hear her laugh again. I said, "Whoever decided we were to love just one person at a time, passionately, must have been a sadist." I couldn't hold back a deep sigh.

She looks up at me from the crib of my arms with such thankfulness. At last we can share a long moment of peacefulness. Maybe someday she will forgive me for becoming lovers with Leslie when she was away.

* * *

That night I have anxious dreams about my sister, Meredith, going back to a time we liked the same boy, Billy. Meredith made me give him a note from her at the movies. I gave it to him, but I also told him that I liked him too. It turned out that he liked me more than my sister. I had never been able to tell my sister this.

In my dream Meredith tells me that Billy has a collection of rabbit tails; he traps wild rabbits and cuts off their tails for his collection. She decides she doesn't really like him that much and that she doesn't care if he likes me more than her.

I also dream I am in my twin crib. But I can't rest there, for some large man—perhaps my brother, perhaps my father or another man I don't know—pulls on my feet to tease me.

"Meredith. Meredith. Don't let him do that?" I cry out.

Mari reaches across to me and strokes my head. "What's the matter, Judith? It's okay." She cradles me the rest of that night and I hold her too. The coldness between us begins to disappear. Relaxed in her arms I tell her about my nightmare. I tell her other

things that my mother has told me: that Meredith came out ten minutes ahead of me, howling and robust. I was somewhat smaller, more timid. We were not identical.

Both Mother and her doctor knew that more than one heart beat in her belly, more than two arms and two legs thrashed about in her womb. But, unbelievably, neither talked about it to the other or to anyone else. Both were afraid to discover she might be carrying an aberration. We were basically healthy babies but I did not want to come out easily. She said the doctors had to stretch her and then one reached in and literally pulled me out by the feet.

Mari and I wonder then if maybe I have dreamt myself back into my mother's womb. That the pulling on my feet was done by the doctor who was forcing me out of my safe home into a world I was not yet ready to face.

Mari never mentions suicide again but she moves to Staten Island to Lee's house. After that, we don't make love for a few weeks. We put our minds to thinking of some kind of work we can do together until she goes back to her country.

* * *

When do we take that long walk, that time she catches the balloon and when it breaks she cries so terribly? The time we talked about betrayal and she tells me clearly for the first time how she felt betrayed by me for being with Leslie.

I remember now; it was not when she came back from Paris, not when she felt the hurt most strongly, but only a few weeks ago. It took Mari over three years to tell me directly that she felt I had betrayed her.

Her English is noticeably correct. Her breasts rise and settle as we step into the busy street. She is the same height as my mother, an inch shorter than I. When I press my arm against her right breast I feel myself relax. She does not trot as much as she used to, but moves solidly along the street, at home with the earth, or in this case, the cement. When we reach the other side of the street, we look at each other and smile.

We are talking about Dove, my latest lover. She says, "Why couldn't you stay together? Does it bother you to tell me?"

I say, "You know its hard to have room inside for someone new when you're still filled with your past loves."

"Be specific for me please, Judith."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't ready to take on a new lover. And especially someone who judged me all the time. But I was lonely. Dove bore into my privacy in a very uncomfortable way. My stomach hurt the whole time I was with her." I am aware of my halting voice; funny, I don't hesitate when I sing. "I mean it just wasn't right for me."

"So why did you live with her at all?" Her question seems more like a statement.

"After you went back to Argentina, Mari, and after I sublet my apartment and moved away from Josh, I really needed to get to know myself again. But that's when I met Dove."

"I got a letter saying you and she were going to move out of the city together. Then I didn't hear from you for a long time. That's when I was hiding with my compañeras in the apartment building outside of Buenos Aires. No mail got through to us. Hey! Judith, watch out. The lights are there for a reason."

I had started to cross Park Avenue against the light, causing a car to swerve and several to honk. One young woman driver screamed at me and gave me the finger.

"I'm really sorry," I call out but the driver is already gone. "Mari, could we sit on a bench by the park for a minute? I need to catch my breath."

We sit down. A young girl walking by tries desperately to blow a bubble. Her cheeks pop out with her effort. In complete frustration she spits a wad of gum the size of a golfball onto the sidewalk then runs to catch up to her mother who scolds her and smiles at us. Together they walk into one of the expensive apartment buildings framing the park. We can't go into the park; there is a locked gate around it.

I rest my hand on Mari's lap. "What were we saying? No, I didn't know about that. At least not until way after the fact. I didn't hear from you for three months. I wrote to your parents

and to your friend, Carlos to find you. They didn't answer me. I was so frustrated. So worried. I had no choice but to find you in my own way. Didn't I tell you about the long meditation I did where I got the message that you were with Estella? I told you that, I'm sure."

"Yes, I remembers, Judith. But first tell me about Dove and you."

A mist surrounds the park today, making the trees, the flowers, seem even more distant then they really are. The trees in this park have always haunted me. Their careful pruned look and their separation from a more natural setting make them seem almost lonely. I feel sad for them.

"Dove and I both wanted to move away from the city. So we hunted for a place in the country to live. We ended up in a small town.We really needed mother nature again. To make a long story short, we went on a kind of mythical journey together."

"Like yours and my mythic journey, Judith?"

"It was different. Dove was a twin too, the first twin I ever spoke to about my experience of being a twin. Maybe it was an experience only twins can have. It was almost as if we traveled back to the womb together."

"Is that why your stomach ache so much?" Mari looks at me skeptically.

I nod. "Maybe. First,Dove and I went to South Hadley where I had gone to a women's college twenty years before. We shared one room for several weeks; I think it was about ten feet by twelve feet if you can imagine that. It was about the size of my sister's and my bedroom when I was a kid. They say we all try to recreate our early childhoods and relive them again, so we can be in control. My studio is a mansion compared to that room. It was in Jane Olive's boarding house, right across from the college, where a lot of lesbians lived.

"There was only one bed, a folding table and an overstuffe chair. When we moved in, Dove's cat, Luna, gave birth to seve kittens. Seven always brought me good luck before but nd then. One of the kittens was crushed when a heavy suitcase fell on it.

"After that, one ghastly event followed another. We had an old Chevy van, 'Eleanor,' with something always wrong. It sucked up all of our savings and I couldn't find a job. Dove and I argued constantly. And when we weren't fighting it seemed like we were reluctantly compromising. We just didn't hit it off.

"I never wanted to stay in South Hadley for one thing, especially after a disgusting incident happened at a local bar."

Mari looks gloomy. This isn't a cheery story.

"One Friday night around 8:00 I was having a drink in the college bar. I was just starting to get relaxed when these three women who were at a working-class bar, the Blue Note, telephoned the bar I was at and said they were in trouble. They sounded desperate. They said that a group of drunk, redneck guys with weapons, machetes, and axes were waiting for them across the street. Apparently, one of the three women was friends with one of the guy's wives and he was mad. I think the two women had become lovers.

"I got a group of women together—luckily it was entertainment night and the place was packed—and we took off like lightning for the Blue Note.

"When we got there we found the group of men standing across the street shouting obscenities at the bar. The three women were inside getting drunker by the second, just scared to death. It was hard to get them to talk to us coherently but finally we worked out a plan. Since the police still hadn't arrived after several calls from us, we agreed to split up into groups and head directly for our cars when the bar closed. We all decided any confrontation with the men would be deadly—no one knew martial defense and we had no weapons."

Mari's hand is on my shoulder. "I feel frightened for you," she says. "The violence is everywhere. In my country its like a permanent atmosphere in the air. Really, no place is safe now for women on the planet. Were you hurted, Judith?"

"No, but I was scared to death, believe me. At one o'clock we all left the bar. But, as soon as we got to the parking lot, Beth, the woman who had become close with one of the guy's wives, suddenly turned toward the men shouting something like, 'I'm

not afraid of you bastards. You babies need weapons because you're cowards.' Then she turned to the rest of us and said, 'I've changed my mind, Sisters, I'm going to stand up to these bastards.'

"I was blown away. How could she after we all agreed upon the safest plan? I could have killed her for endangering all of us. And to make things worse, two comrades lined up beside her and then several women formed a line, to face this really dangerous crew coming at us, flexing their muscles, and brandishing their axes.

"Dove and I raced to our van, which for once started immediately, and tore to the police station. We ordered the policeman behind the night desk to send cops to the Blue Note at once. He snorted in a sinister way and said, 'Don't worry girls, our boys are already there.'

"We didn't have time to find out why they hadn't responded to our call sooner. We raced back to the bar. We couldn't believe our eyes when we got there. Beth was being jabbed in the ribs by a mean-looking cop. That's putting it mildly. The guy looked like a werewolf. Two of his teeth stuck out like fangs. I'm not kidding.

"I jumped out of the truck, ran up to him, grabbed his stick and looked him right in the eyes. 'What do you think you're doing, young man?' I demanded. He couldn't believe that I wasn't afraid of him. He stepped back from me and snarled, 'We don't want your kind around here, lady. Do we now, boys?' Can you believe it? He was actually winking at one of the drunks, the one who had a huge knife.

"The scene was like Dryer's court scene in *Joan of Arc*. They threw around winks and grins like chips at a poker game. You wouldn't believe the jeers and smirks coming from these guys. This was enemy territory. At least I stopped the cop from jabbing Beth. But he put handcuffs on her and arrested her for causing a disturbance, while the men were released. And they were the ones with weapons.

"Meanwhile, the husband of Beth's lover had socked Beth in the jaw while we had been at the police station. And the cops

didn't arrest him either."

Mari interrupts me. "They didn't care about protecting you?"

"Oh no, any hope that the local police were interested in our safety was crushed. I wanted to leave the next day but Dove had begun to make some close friends there and didn't want to. So masochistic me agreed to stay. I tried to get into my own work but the situation with Dove and I just got worse and worse. Finally we agreed to separate."

The story has exhausted me. In fact, every time I tell someone about the Blue Note Bar incident I feel energy drain out of me. I need a kind word from Mari, but I can see she is into her own thoughts. If there is one thing I learned being with Dove, it was how much a person needs to be left alone when they are doing heavy thinking.

I take some deep breaths and wait until she looks at me again before I say, "So I packed up my belongings and was about to drive away from South Hadley for good when 'Eleanor' died completely. I had to rent a car with my last savings to get out of there the next morning. Dove hardly spoke to me. She had already begun to move into a house with eight of her friends. What a nightmare! I ended up at the Cape in a small cabin. It never felt so good to have my own space."

"After sharing a womb together, I can see that you really needed your own room." Mari laughs for the first time. I'm relieved. I was afraid my account had depressed her.

"Did you have the electrics and hot system?" she asks.

"No. I was part of a community called the *Grapevine Women;* we all lived in simple cabins with no plumbing, or electric anything. We used candles and wood stoves and raised cranberries and grapes for a living. I stayed there for a year. Then I came back to New York so I could make a record of my music. Thank the goddess I was farsighted enough to have sublet my studio here on 5th Avenue. For once, I had a place to come back to."

Mari gets up from the bench and gestures to me to join her. We walk past the elegant Gramercy Park and its sleek iron fence. I notice that no one is in the park today.

"I still don't know why you couldn't embrace her to you."

Mari eyes me sharply.

"I've been trying to tell you, sweetheart. There were some things we could share, like the fact that we were both twins and we were able to help each other in some ways. We hashed through all the taboos we had experienced—feeling as though we were untouchable freaks not to be trusted by others because we might betray a friend's secret to our twin. Dove knew what I meant when I said I had to carve out my oneness since I was born paired like she was. It's amazing how many people fantasize having a twin. They think they would always have someone complimentary who understood their every groan. But believe me, being a twin is no picnic. You're always being compared so you can't think of yourself without thinking of the other one. When a twin says 'I' it just never is the same thing as when other people say 'I'.

"Wowse! What could happens if I found my twin?" Mari delights in this thought.

"Well, it proved disastrous for me to find this twin. She knew instinctively how to hurt me. She wasn't careful of me. I realized how protective Meredith was of me when we were little. I was the baby, because I was born last and also I was smaller. Even with twins there's a hierarchy because you can't both come out at the same time, even with identical twins. I could see how Meredith acted like my older sister. She was given our grandmother's name; no one in the family was called Judith. But I took care of her too. I was always trying to get her to study more to keep up her grades. I wouldn't compete with her. I'm understanding more and more how twins should be raised like any other siblings, not be trained to be twins. They need to develop their own individuality and if possible have their own rooms. It's enough to have shared a womb for nine months. I was always anxious about Meredith and me. Dove was the older twin. Maybe that's why she felt she had the right to bully me."

"I wouldn't let my twin bully me," Mari says.

"Dove had such a hunger to be seen, such expectations that I would be the one finally to understand her. She told me her mother was sick when she and her sister were young; they were

cared for by an aunt, I think, who apparently wasn't that into them. It seemed I was always failing her; but then, I didn't feel that appreciated either."

"The movies and stories feed us so much the romantic expectations. I had that with you."

"I'm still fucked up around that with you, Mari. Of course, you know that. We're all addicts of romance. That's why you have to stay up at Josh's place. I can't accept yet that we'll never be lovers again."

"Maybe best to keep to the topic now, Judith," Mari says.

"How many times I said, or screamed at Dove, 'Don't tell me who I am and I won't tell you who you are.'"

"I don't think it matter whether you were the twin or not. You make so big deal about that. Seem like a so human need to have enough space. Maybe if you didn't live together, especially in so small room, would have been better."

"If people have learned to be careful of each other they can share very small spaces. Look at the way people have to live in China, in most of the world. Large families in two or three rooms."

"Look how poor people live in the boxes. Doesn't mean that's healthy for anyone."

"Okay, maybe it was just the fact that we were scrunched up together. But I can tell you this: I didn't know just how precious my own observations are to me before then. After Dove I felt that if anyone tried to take my feelings, my perceptions away from me, that's it. Cut. They are out of my life. I must have been as desperate to be understood as she was, otherwise why did she upset me so. I kept chanting the Yiddish word *dayenu* because I thought it meant 'enough already.' One twin is enough, two twins are too much. But it really means, 'that would be enough.' If we had stayed as friends, *dayenu*, that certainly would have been enough."

"Okay, forget it," Mari says. "I don't think the universe could bear two like me anyway. Mari, *dayenu*."

"Oh, Mari, I love you so much. But now if *you* were a twin that would be great. Then one of you could live in Argentina and

the other could always live here with me. It's so hard, isn't it? Somebody should give us a gold medal for going through what we've gone through together."

"But I'm the one who has suffered with you, Judith. I don't have a twin to know what that's been like."

"I don't talk to Meredith about you. Well, that's not all true. She came to see me this summer. I told you. Oh, forget it. Another time. Too much twin talk can get to you. We hardly know anything about each other's lives now which is so strange, considering that it was almost like we were married from inception till we separated at eighteen."

Mari grimaces at me. "It's not quite the same thing, Judith," she says.

At the corner of Twentieth Street and Third Avenue I take her elbow, steering her sharp right. I hardly notice the traffic today, or the steady flow of passersby which other times can crowd in on me in a disturbing way.

"Watch out!" Mari jerks me away from a pile of rotten fruit strewn along the sidewalk.

"Go on, Judith," she instructs after we fall into step again. "So why was it disastrous to be with Dove?" She is relentless.

"For one thing I wouldn't use the word *lesbian* as much as Dove did. She wanted everything to be lesbian. Our van was lesbian. The hats she stole from K-Mart were lesbian. Everything seemed to be lesbian to Dove, everything beautiful that is. Except me. She said that my less frequent use of the word proved that I was afraid of being one."

"Sounds like so immature. Like silly," Mari frowns.

"I know, but that's how it was. And once when I told her a dream I had where Josh appeared in a favorable light she said that meant I loved him more than I loved her. This made me a betrayer of womankind. Obviously, I just wasn't the right person for her, excuse me, the right *lesbian*. She was very intimidating, Mari. Everything became neatly classified for her as either male or female, and I mean everything. Sinister jokes were male. Sweet ones were female. Foods were either male or female. The way you cut up vegetables proved your sexual orientation. And

then when her male and female identification process got to furniture I couldn't take it. She threw our bed out and a comfortable chair, not because they were old, but because they were heavy and male-like..."

"It's the true. Some of the furniture is the more delicate."

"I know some pretty indelicate women and some pretty delicate men, Mari."

"That's the true too."

"I agreed with some of her differentiations. But I couldn't reason with her at all. I just can't live when every object around me is categorized. It was inconsequential to Dove that women give birth to both men and women and therefore have an essential role to play in bringing about equality of the sexes. That's what I think. She was more tyrannical with me than any man I've been with. But then I haven't been with that many men."

It feels good to laugh together.

"So did she have an estomache all the time too?" Mari asks.

"Mari, I'm getting sick talking about this. I think she had a head ache and a soul ache all the time."

"You did anyway," Mari comments with neither kindness or meanness in her voice. "What kinds of dreams did you have about Josh?"

"I dreamt Dove and I were walking together side by side like you and I are now, but down a steep road. It must have been a cement one because all of a sudden Josh came zooming past us on roller skates. When he reached the bottom of the hill he made a U-turn and flew right up the hill again.

"When I said to Dove, 'It was like magic the way Josh did that,' she said, 'He has a very strong power over you, Loon. You still see men as the ones who can do the special things, don't you?' She didn't think of the fact that I had dreamt the whole thing and Josh was a symbol of magical powers in me. That I was slowly reclaiming my own magic powers—and also there are a mixture of male and female energies in me anyway.

"Then she told me that she dreamt of a ritual gathering where I was taking part in the ceremony. There were two men in the group, so she left shouting at me, 'You constantly betray me, Loon!'"

"Who is this Loon you are talking about?" Mari puzzles.

"Sometimes she called me Loon," I giggle. "I know it sounds peculiar now. Then she became Crescent and I became Lute. At one point she was Peanut and I was Butter. I guess we were slightly crazy. That part was fun though."

"Judith, it's like so mysterious to me, these name changes, like disguises or something. I can't to keep up with them. To me you are Judith."

"We did it so that we kept in mind the fact that the universe, events, all living things are constantly changing. That nothing is fixed. But you see what I mean, Mari? How invasive she was?"

"Maybe she was in love with you. You are the harsh with her still."

"Probably I'm defensive because people have felt my intensity to be invasive to them. So I have to work at this too. But she really was a hungry, lonely animal who dug into my mind and then left me with her psychic fleas."

"What's that?"

"She made me uncomfortable all over like fleas do. I was too shaky with her. Maybe it can be a whole other ballgame for lesbians with an independent income. But I have to keep some positive feelings towards men, especially since I work with them. An open door generates the possibility of communication. You know, I grew up with a brother. It's natural for me to have some comraderie with a man. And I love Josh and Saul. You know that. They love me too. And sometimes I think they even understand me, believe it or not. Does that make me a lesbian with heterosexual tendencies? That doesn't mean you have to be manipulated by them."

"That is the key for our struggle in my country, Judith. Working together with some kind of true caring. Just is. We needs to have a long talk about this some other time."

"I'm almost done with this, Mari. It's still a sore spot in me. Probably my stomach ached all the time because I couldn't be myself with her; I wasn't growing. I felt judged and repressed."

"It sound like a so painful time for you." Her voice feels almost like a touch. I hadn't realized how tense I'd become.

"It's funny, Judith, because all during that time I was in a kind of similar place with my compañera Estella. She love me so much, but I couldn't to forget about you. Sometimes I felt my heart to break because she didn't want me to loves you. But I couldn't to tear out my heart for her. She is a so kind person. More kind I think than me. She take all my troubles and stupidness to her. And there are times I get so impatient with her. Times I just want to be alone. But we share a cabin by necessity. I can't afford it myself. A so poor house. By the Parana River. No electric. No plumbings. Just a leetle wood house. So sweet. And it's her money from school supplies which keep us. But I couldn't to stop her from being jealous of you."

"I remember writing to you that I wanted you to let go of me so that you could feel closer to Estella. You had to be where you were, in Argentina. In your wooden house, with your compañera."

"Yes. That was a so beautiful letter. It helped me to be okay with myself again."

"Well, I was okay with myself again, when I left Dove. But I'd forgotten how to care for myself in little ways. It felt like I had given up my body to other people. So I had to reclaim my body as well as my sense of self worth."

"It's true," Mari affirms with particular emphasis. She understands then what I feel.

"It's something like that I felt with you," she continues.

"You mean that you had to reclaim your body too?"

"No, betrayal. When I came back from Paris and you were with Leslie. Betrayal. Yes, that is what I felt. I felt like Dove felt."

"But, Mari, that isn't what I was talking about." She's pulled the rug out from under me.

Her face has changed. Old angers show. I feel stunned, as if slapped by her.

A sleepy-looking man, wearing torn trousers and stiff socks with no shoes steps directly between us. "Fifty cents, Ladies? A gentleman needs a drink," he says good-naturedly.

I reach for change but he does not stop, and I do not move towards him. I could use a drink too, now that I know what's

behind all of these questions. She has her proof, verified by my story of Dove, that I am a betrayer.

"Mari, you haven't really been listening to me have you? You've just been adding up points against me. You think it's my fault that she and I didn't get along perfectly. Is that it? What's going on here? I swear, nobody understands me." I feel so vulnerable, so disturbed. I must defend myself.

"I had many wonderful insights with Dove. So there were positive things. I dreamt about tribes of women with one big eye in their foreheads. You know how when you place your face against someone's, your eyes blend into one big eye. I guess that closeness symbolized a special way of being together for me, because in my dreams these women were always happy and vital. But even though we did have fantastic insights with each other, Dove fastened on the things about me which bothered her. Personally, I think she was punishing me for things done to her by her mother. Please don't you do that to me, Mari. I didn't betray you. I didn't say I wouldn't be with someone else. Maybe in your mind I betrayed what you had hoped would be between us, but wasn't."

My hands are clenched at my sides. We are both pulled to the Korean fruit and vegetable stand at the corner. I am drawn to the apples and pears, she to the grapes and cherries.

"Damn it, Mari. How often do we know ahead of time what we should do? I was constantly talking about you to her and she didn't appreciate that either." There. If I'm a betrayer than she's an accomplice in my crime.

"We need to eat some fruit now. That will help us," she says.

Mari has taken on a reptilian look. Cold, unbending. She blinks huge yellow and green eyes at the cherries. Betrayal, betrayer, betrayed. I already knew that Mari felt I betrayed her. How come we didn't work this out the second time she was here?

"Besides," I say putting some pears in a plastic bag, "Dove betrayed my confidence in her...."

Where is Mari? She's not beside me. There she is stalking something, like a pointer about to bee line for game. What's go-

ing on with her?

"I'm sorry, Mari," I call out. "Wait for me. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt us."

She dashes down the street. I see now. She's in pursuit of a balloon, trailing colorful strings. The balloon has a life of it's own. It skips playfully this way and that. Does it belong to that child hugging the parking meter? He gapes, wide-eyed, puckered mouth at the sight. No one else chases the object.

I pay for the fruit and run after her. "I'll help you," I cry out.

"No, I want to. She is mine!"

After awkward attempts to catch the string, the balloon decides to land. Mari quickly scoops it up. "I have her," she boasts.

A small Italian man stares at her from his pizza parlor window. He jabs at a co-worker to catch the sight: a grown woman bedazzled by a balloon.

Mari stands before me, beaming. "Oh, she is beautiful like a red sun. Judith, it remind me of my childhood when the Gypsies came to our village and had the carnival and I would wander away from the house of my mama and papa and look for them. I talk to them and they gave me little pieces of meat to nibble and soups from them kittle and tasty crackets, and balloons like she. They were always for me such the mysterious things."

She rubs the balloon against her chest, oblivious of the large ERA button pinned there.

"Mari, be careful," I gasp. "Mariposa, watch out, the balloon will—"

The space between us is ripped apart by exploding rubber. Then the woman from Argentina who has traveled across continents cries unashamedly.

* * *

I dream Mari prances up the stairs again, the eighty-eight wooden steps of my building, sounding just like a colt. As she approaches, her eyes flash and fill me as stars do. I gaze at her, almost hypnotized and she hands me flowers, all kinds of colors, but ones unfamiliar to me. I feel immensely alive.

"All. All. I want them all," she says meeting my glance.

"What have you come for this time?" I ask her.

I am not surprised when my question turns her into a small, yellow butterfly that settles on my arm.

I then feel an urgent need to look at myself in the mirror. When I do, I see an open look that denies any possibility that I was an intentional betrayer.